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Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

Discussion paper contributed by the Women's Major Group**

Summary

This paper was developed by the United Nations Forum on Forests major group focal points for women to provide input to the discussions of the Forum at its third session. It indicates some steps taken by women in Ghana, Uganda and other countries towards ensuring equity and sustainability within the forest sector and obstacles that women have encountered in implementing sustainable forest management, as well as women's recommendations to Governments and other international forest policy players on the way forward in partnership with women in forests.

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Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction		
II.	Women's contribution to the economic aspects of forests		
III.	Women's contribution to forest health and productivity		
IV.	Women's contributions to maintaining forest cover to meet present and future needs		9
V.	Overarching constraints on women's organizations working in forests		12
VI.	Recommendations to the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and other international forest policy players		15

Page
4 3
6 3
8 4
11 4
14 6
16 6

I. Introduction

1. For centuries, women have gathered, processed and marketed forest products for households in Africa, Asia and Latin America to meet subsistence needs, affecting and being affected by the issues addressed at the third session of the United Nations Forum on Forests on economic aspects of forests, forest health and productivity and maintaining forest cover to meet present and future needs.

2. Women themselves recognize the problems of deforestation, desertification and environmental degradation. Given their close link to forests in their daily lives, they are the first to suffer, as these environmental changes affect their ability to obtain firewood, water and other resources for household use and economic activities. In many countries, large areas of communal forestland are being cleared for agriculture or for commercial forestry. In addition to negative ecological and social effects, this widespread deforestation and land conversion reduces access to forest products that are required by women and their families on a daily basis, thereby adding to the drudgery of women, who are forced to cover long distances and spend more time in search of much-needed fuelwood and other forest products.

3. For example, in peri-urban centres in Northern Ghana and rural India women spend between 4-6 hours collecting fuelwood, fodder and cooking. In some cases, this extreme physical drudgery causes serious reproductive problems in women.[1] This situation is compounded by male migration, as males leave rural villages to search for work in urban centres, which inevitably increases the work and responsibilities that fall on women, leaving less time for the demanding tasks of collecting and processing forest products.

4. The sustainable use of forests requires the participation of all rural populations, including their female segment. Although women's needs often differ from those of men, many programmes tend to overlook women's specific needs regarding forestry, mainly because policy makers and planners lack adequate data, information and methodologies to address them. This report hopes to provide a basic introduction to the central role women play in forest management and will provide concrete suggestions as to how Governments and other global forest players can facilitate the inclusion of women in international forest policy.

II. Women's contribution to the economic aspects of forests

5. Women in rural forested areas are key actors in using and providing several types of non-timber forest products to markets. They spend most of their time in forests gathering fuelwood and many non-timber products, such as gum, fruits, oils, fibres and vines for cloth- and mat-making. Thus, forests provide a major source of paid employment for rural women. Furthermore, women tend to be more dependent than men on trees and small-scale forest industries for income. In Uttar Pradesh, India, one study showed that women derived 33 to 45 per cent of their income from forests and common land, compared with only 13 per cent for men. However, although a significant proportion of the forestry industry workforce is made up of women, their roles are not fully documented or recognized, their working conditions tend to be poor and their wages lower than those of men.

6. Women collect and sell non-timber products worldwide. In order to ensure their continuous supply of forest products to identified markets, some women have

established woodlots and have been trained by women's organizations in snail rearing and mushroom cultivation. For example, Green Earth Organization trained 200 women in snail rearing, mushroom and woodlot cultivation in Beyin and Aidozuazo, the western region of Ghana, in 1999. These women generated income from these activities, which they use for basic development needs, such as their children's school fees. In the Tano District of Ghana, similar projects were carried out with 150 women from the areas of Bormaa, Yamfe, Susuanso Adiobaa and Dua Yaw Nkwanta. Activities such as these acknowledge and enhance the contributions that women make to the economic aspects of the forest sector.

III. Women's contribution to forest health and productivity

7. Women, as a significant part of rural forest populations, are greatly affected by bushfires, the destruction of forest by insects and air pollution. Women recognize their vulnerability in this respect and have joined the fight against these threats to forest health and productivity. For example, women's organizations have coordinated programmes addressing the problem of bushfires to maintain forest health and, thus, their own livelihoods. For example, Green Earth Organization in Ghana organized five settlements with the Brong Ahafo region, which has been noted for frequent bushfires. Thirty women were trained in each settlement in 2000 to educate other members of the community to put a stop to the use of fire to clear farmland, which has helped reduce the incidence of harmful forest fires in their area.

8. Rural women are often the principal caretakers and guardians of the forests, seeing to the daily nurturing of forests around their homes to ensure their continued productivity. In many regions, women engage in agro-forestry in their home. In Thailand, for example, in the home gardens of a single village, researchers found 230 different plant species, many of which had been rescued from a neighbouring forest before it was cleared. And in a single African home garden, more than 60 species of food-producing trees were counted. Women are primary conservationists of forest species in their daily lives and are thus also key to the future productivity of forests.

IV. Women's contributions to maintaining forest cover to meet present and future needs

9. Women have extensive knowledge of forest resources. This helps them select specific forest foods that are an important source of income and nutrition for the family. As food supplements, forest foods provide certain nutrients that are not found in many staple crops, and may feed many families during hunger and famine caused by drought, floods, pests or diseases. The food security issue is a key one for women in forests and thus links women strongly to the need to maintain forest cover for their present and future needs.

10. In many parts of the world, women affect forest cover by being largely responsible for fuelwood collection. In Central America, for instance, over 50 per cent of the rural population depends on wood for energy. These activities give women unique and valuable knowledge about trees and forest products. Even women with little or no formal education know about the qualities of woods and locations of supplies and such ecosystem services as the value of tree leaf-litter for

soils and the medicinal values of barks, leaves and resins from trees. Nicaraguan women, for example, commonly know which tree species lasts longest as fuel and which types enhance flavours in food. Given their direct daily forest needs and their intimate knowledge of their local forests, women are a valuable resource for ensuring that forests are sustained to meet the needs of women and their families.

11. Experiences from all over the world over the years have already shown that women have great interest in defending and restoring the forest ecosystem so as to maintain forest cover and meet present and future needs. India's Chipko Movement is a famous example of women defending forests against destruction. In 1974, in the Reni Forest of the Chamoli District, 2,500 trees were given to commercial contractors. Women mobilized to form a human shield so as to protect the forest from being exploited. The contractors had to withdraw and the forest was saved.

(a) In Brazil, the Acao Democratica Feminina Gaucha (ADFG), a women's development-oriented organization, has developed into a strong environmental defender, opposing indiscriminate lumbering activities that destroy the Amazon rain forest.

(b) In the Philippines, the Lingkod Tao-Kalikason (secretariat for an ecologically sound Philippines), headed by two women and including many women members, promotes educational programmes on afforestation with the view to reversing the tragic destruction of the forests.

(c) Protest against deforestation is not the only response. Women are also leading attempts to reverse the destruction of the forest by planting trees. Kenya's Green Belt Movement, started in 1977 by the National Council of Women, the Green Earth Organization-Ghana and the Uganda Women's Tree Planting Movement-Uganda are well-known examples of positive developments. For example, Green Earth Organization led 320 women in 1998 and 1999 in an afforestation project at Aidozuaze in Western Region in Ghana. A fuel-efficient training workshop was organized in Manya Krobo District for 150 women in Ghana to reduce the burden of women in the daily search for fuelwood. Fuel-efficient stoves that are energy saving were introduced to these women. Another example is an International Tropical Timber Organization project in Ghana organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and the 31st December Women's Movement of Ghana, a local NGO. Nurseries were established in three ecological areas in Ghana, namely, Weija, Eduaden and Vea, and were managed by women. Smaller ones were developed in the ten regions of Ghana and in 1996, 304,800 seedlings were raised.

(d) In Côte d'Ivoire, many women have created a number of organizations that participate in forestry at a grass-roots level. These include cooperatives to carry out tasks such as seed collection, production of nursery plants and agroforestry. In the Central African Republic, women have formed associations to rehabilitate the heavily degraded urban forests.

(e) In Cameroon, similar women's organizations are involved in environmental protection activities. Some in the north of the country are engaged in tree planting to control the southwards advance of the desert. In Mundema in the south-west, adjacent to the Korup National Park, the largest wildlife reserve in the country, a group called Ekoso Bene Choco Libie has been active since the establishment of the Park. Kurop project commissioned the women to disseminate information and educate local people on the conservation of the environment.

V. Overarching constraints on women's organizations working in forests

12. Although women play multiple roles in protecting forest resources, they have little ownership or control over forest resources. An analysis of tree planting by women and men in 24 districts of Uganda by the Uganda Women's Tree Planting Movement demonstrates that women are significantly less likely than men to plant trees on homestead land, where the security of their duration of tenure is uncertain due to the likelihood of change in marital status. However, men and women are equally likely to plant trees in community woodlots where the duration of their tenure is secure if they remain village residents. These findings demonstrate the importance of attention to gendered security of tenure considerations at the sub-household level. This imbalance in the ownership and control over resources places women in a subordinate and disempowered position relative to men, relegating women to be forever dependent.

13. Adding to these difficulties, rural women usually lack access to credit and seldom own land. For example in Latin America, credit is often a bottleneck for all small farmers, but even more so for women, usually because of gender biases in credit policies. Participatory forest management must not only take into account gender differences in needs and priorities but also ensure women independent access and entitlements programmes that allow them to sustainably benefit from and protect forest resources.

14. A key constraint to involving women in sustainable forest management is the lack of women's technical and policy influencing capacity. In both developed and developing countries, women often lack basic understanding of governmental processes and are therefore not involved or do not involve themselves in any level of decision-making and policy formulation.

VI. Recommendations to the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and other international forest policy players

15. **To promote women in forestry, it is suggested that:**

(a) Action should be taken to limit factors that hinder women's mobilization in forest management policy, such as the lack of water or distance to water points. Furthermore, broader, integrated development projects and programmes, in which forestry and environmental issues are only a component, would be more beneficial to rural women than narrow sectoral projects;

(b) Policies in certain sectors, such as land and tree tenure, should carefully be reviewed and assessed. Traditional tenure systems should be adaptable to current circumstances so as to provide equitable access to resources at the community level. Traditional systems should be harmonized with other rights, such as ensuring women equitable access to resources, education and development;

(c) Action should be taken to enhance women's full participation in the management of forests from the stage of conceptualizing policy through to

detailed planning and design of institutional mechanisms, to implementation, monitoring and evaluation;

(d) Policies and programmes should be redirected to make education and training more useful and accessible to women. Although gender disparities in education occur in many fields, the forestry and agriculture professions are the extreme cases of inadequate female representation. Education and training are key to greater involvement of women in forest management;

(e) Foresters should be trained in communication skills, extension techniques, gender analysis, rural sociology, social forestry and agro forestry, so as to become more aware of ensuring that more women are trained in forestry.

16. **The support of donors, bilateral and multilateral organizations is needed to promote women's participation in forestry and in natural resource and environmental management. More women professionals are needed to work in such organizations on these issues. Support to women may be provided in the following six major areas:**

(a) Provide the necessary resources for the training of women in forestry and natural resource fields, from the technical training of grass-roots women to professional training;

(b) Support forestry projects that empower women to manage resources, beginning with women's own priorities;

(c) Conduct research on women's activities that require gender-disaggregated data in area studies and impact studies. Organizations with such programmes might encourage using this data in their activities and fund national Governments and NGOs to undertake such studies;

(d) Finance and support communicating, networking and disseminating information gained from on the ground experience and research through audio-visual materials, publications, workshops, exchange visits and technical cooperation between and among NGOs;

(e) Ensure that international policy activities, such as the Tropical Forestry Action Programme, explicitly consider women's participation and the impact of programmes and projects on women;

(f) Finally, international forest policy players should take concrete steps to facilitate women's participation in international conferences and debates on forests and other development issues.

Notes

[1] Indoor Air Pollution Newsletter — Energy and health for the poor. World Bank ESMAP. Issue No. 1, September 2000; Issue No. 3, December 2000.